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SUBJECT: ACTING ARMENIAN PATRIARCH CRITICIZES TREATMENT BY GOT

¶1. Summary. During a November 3 farewell call by the Ambassador acting Armenian Patriarch, Archbishop Aram Ateysan described Patriarch Mesrob II's failing health and indicated the Patriarch will likely continue in his position until death. Atesyan also outlined the impact of the amended Foundations Law and expressed his sadness at the lack of tangible outcomes from the Turkish community and government following the murder of Hrant Dink. End summary.

¶2. According to Archbishop Atesyan, the Patriarch is suffering from dementia and has become very forgetful. His staff takes him out for two to three hours of fresh air daily as he gradually "takes his hands from the world." The Archbishop stressed that despite his poor health Mesrob II remains the Patriarch, and only upon his death or choice to renounce his role does an election occur. Additionally, 51 percent of the delegates who initially elected him can also call him down from the Patriarchy.

¶3. While noting that the Armenian community has an on-going problem with the GOT, the Archbishop said that their situation improved during the AKP government. He stressed that Prime Minister Erdogan is not a nationalist, and therefore he understands the community. The 2008 amendment to the Foundations Law showed that the AKP was open to greater minority rights. According to the Archbishop, Armenian foundations requested the return of 500 pieces of property and only 50 have been returned. Despite the GOT contention that it cannot return the remaining pieces as they have been sold to third parties, the European Court of Human Rights stated that in such cases the GOT must provide compensation to the requesting party.

¶4. Critical of the lack of concrete results following the "show" of support after the murder of Hrant Dink, the Archbishop said the "people have given their attention but nothing else, nothing positive." As Turkish citizens, he said, the Armenian community wants what is rightfully theirs and "does not want any more than any other Turk." The government has decided to hold back these rights, and not to recognize the Patriarchate as a formal institution, because of their differences with Armenia, he contends. According to the Archbishop, problems between the Armenian communities - in Turkey and Armenia - and the Turkish community are created by politicians, not the people themselves. President Gul's trip to view the soccer match between the Armenian and Turkish national teams in Yerevan was a good gesture, he said, and more must be done to open doors between the two countries.

¶5. With the potential of greater rights as minorities and Turkish citizens in mind, the Archbishop hopes Turkey will enter the European Union. In 1910, he explained that there were 2,200 Armenian Orthodox Churches in Turkey while only 45 remain today. Currently the GOT does not provide any funds to

maintain their churches, schools, newspapers and hospital, and the community survives through the donations and work of the Armenian foundations. Overall, the Archbishop contends, the AKP desires to improve conditions for members of minority religious communities, but other parties have a role in decision-making on government levels.

WIENER